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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 000921

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ITALY SUPPORTS ENHANCED EU PRESENCE ON
GEORGIA-RUSSIA BORDER

REF: A) STATE 43096 B) ROME 861

Classified By: POL MINISTER COUNSELOR TOM COUNTRYMAN. REASON: 1.4 (B)(
D)

1. (C) As reported ref b, MFA EU CFSP Director Luigi Mattiolo told poloff March 11 that the EU strategy at the moment would be to reinforce the office of the recently created EU Special Representative for the Caucasus, to include the 6 trainers mentioned in ref a. He underlined that this was an "interim step" in response to Russian opposition to continued operation of the OSCE BMO. Italy would not necessarily oppose a further reinforcement of the SREP or a monitoring mission as suggested ref a but only after a period of "assessment" by the SREP. Mattiolo noted that consensus for an EU mission to replace the OSCE BMO "is nowhere in sight" in Brussels.

2. (C) Taking advantage of DAS Stephens' March 15 call on POLDIR Terzi and EUR DG Caracciolo (readout septel) POL Minister-Counselor underlined with both the strong US view that a continued monitoring presence was essential to reduce tensions along the border. With the OSCE gone, the EU was the most logical choice to take on the role. Terzi voiced his government's disappointment with the Russian action. He noted that FM Fini had emphasized to Russian FM Lavrov during his February 7 visit to Moscow the need for Russia to take a more positive role on the full range of "frozen conflicts," including Moldova, Georgia and Chechnya. Terzi said that Italy would urge its EU partners to be supportive of our request. He agreed that the OSCE monitoring mission had proven its value and needs to be continued in a new guise. Repeating his concern about Russian behavior, he emphasized that the EU would have to take on a more robust role in a way that did not let the Russians think that they could get away with a rolling sabotage of the OSCE as an organization. Terzi does not want to give up the possibility of restoring the OSCE mission.

3. (C) Carraciale was even more critical of the Russians, confiding that when Fini raised the "frozen conflicts" issue in Moscow, Lavrov's response was nothing more than a "pack of lies." The Russians prefer to see these destabilizing conflicts continue rather than risk what they perceive to be a loss of influence in the region. Caracciolo agreed in principle on the necessity of continued monitoring on the border and promised to discuss the specifics of the ref a proposals with his MFA colleagues.

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